1996

Women in Japanese Literature

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Womanhood

in Japanese Literature

(by Martina Barth)

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in
Asian Studies.

1996

Foreword

During my stay in Japan I became very interested in the problems many Japanese women encounter living in a male-dominated society. I met a host of women, young and old alike, who were unhappy with their limited opportunities in the working world. Many of these women did not consider being a full-time mother and wife fulfilling. There were also a large number of women who were completely happy in the role of mother and wife and used the independence they gained once their children were grown up. However, I will focus in this paper on those women who did not want to assume traditional roles, but instead wanted a chance in the male-dominated world outside of Japanese homes. In approaching this thesis paper, I first intended to focus solely on the continuing difficulties of women in Japan to gain independence from male dominance. However, as I was also very intrigued by Japanese literature, I decided to combine these two interests in a paper on "Womanhood in Japanese Literature."

Analyzing four different novels by two male and two female authors, I was very surprised by the way women were being portrayed. Particularly intriguing to me was the fact that works of both female as well as male authors have a tendency to point out, consciously as well as unconsciously, problems of women in Japanese society.

It occurred to me that all four authors seem to have a very gender-specific way of depicting Japanese women, and the problems they find in Japanese culture and society, regarding the roles they were expected to play. Both female authors, Sawako Ariyoshi and Kyoko Mori, had a very direct, straight-forward manner of addressing and depicting the plight of Japanese women. The male authors I have surveyed, Junichiro Tanizaki and Yasunari

Kawabata, on the other hand, depicted women from a male point of view, in very traditional and highly valued roles, such as that of the mother and that of the maiden. By doing so they pointed out, more than likely unconsciously, problems associated with the traditional roles of women and women's confinement in these roles.

Included in this research paper are my own views, drawn from experiences I made during my stay in Japan, as well as sociological analysis of women's roles as seen in the work Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future, as well as literary analysis of the four pieces of literature I have chosen. Due to a lack of accessibility to research materials in Japanese, and my own inability to read the original works, this paper may be slightly tainted by the opinions of American translators as well as my own opinions influenced by life in Europe and America.

Introduction

As can be observed from the conversation between several men, namely Genji, To no Chujo, and some of the latter's retainers, recounted by Lady Murasaki Shikibu in The Tale of Genji, Japanese men seem to have been judging the worthiness of women according to certain characteristics from the earliest beginnings of Japanese history. These judgments were not always favorable towards women and were often times based on merely physical aspects:

> There are surprisingly pretty ladies wasting away behind tangles of weeds, and hardly anyone even knows of their existence. The first surprise is hard to forget. There she is, a girl with a fat, sloppy old father and boorish brother and a house that seems common at best. ... She is not the equal of the one who has everything, of course, but she has her charm. She is not easy to pass by (Lady Murasaki 23/4).

However, very different attributes of a woman were taken into consideration when a man contemplated taking a woman for his wife, rather than merely having an affair with her, as was probably the case in the above quotation. Most important seemed to be the marriage candidate's gentle and forgiving character as far as affairs of her future husband were concerned:

> It is very foolish for a woman to let a little dalliance upset her so much that she shows her resentment openly. She should be quiet and generous, and when something comes up that quite properly arouses her resentment she should make it known by delicate hints (Lady Murasaki 26).

According to the conversation between these men, however, "It is with women as it is with everything else: the flawless ones are very few indeed" (Lady Murasaki 21). One may argue that it was a woman who wrote The Tale of Genji, and therefore a woman's point of view that was reflected. Lady Murasaki did not record her novel as a fictional tale, however, but recounted

the lives of men and women at the imperial court of the ancient Heian period[1]. Hence, it were men who passed judgment on women, not Lady Murasaki.

Very much in the same fashion as the men observed by Murasaki Shikibu, Kawabata and Tanizaki focused in their novels Snow Country and The Makioka Sisters on pointing out the characteristics of women which they considered most commendable or most repulsive. Women are portrayed from the perspective of apparent connoisseurs of female beauty and seem to be placed on a pedestal, to be looked at and acted upon by men.

It would not be true to say that all male Japanese authors concern themselves only with the way they believe women should preferably be, that is, obedient, young, and beautiful. However, in reading Japanese literary works, I think it becomes quite clear that many of them do. Real-life issues of Japanese women, such as their being caught in an old-fashioned system which ascribes to them the roles of wife, mother, and caregiver, are, for the most part, ignored. It also appears that, sometimes it does not even occur to these authors that there may be problems connected with these roles.

Women writers, in contrast to male writers, seem to have been divided by the question of how to portray their own gender in literature. Their decisions have been strongly influenced by a male-dominated society which acted, and continues to act even to this day, as censor and critic of all literature. Between the Heian and Meiji periods women became unable to participate in the writing of literature, due to the fact that the social order in

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[1] The Heian period is a span of almost four hundred years, beginning approximately with the year 794 and extending to about 1185. The Heian period, under the Kamakura Shogunate, is notable as the period of the greatest flowering of the aristocratic culture centered at the imperial court. (Kodansha Encyclopedia 122)

place at the time "was based upon the Confucian family system in which women's roles were defined solely as those of wife and mother" (Ariga, Chieko M. in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 44). These ideals for a woman's life, taken from a male perspective, continued to appear in men's literature and persisted even in womens' writings when women were once again allowed into the arena of Japanese literature. Not until the postwar years emerged in Japan a group of women writers who treated subject matters, "expanded to include hatred of motherhood, womanhood, or women's bodies" (Ariga Chieko M. in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 44). But even nowadays:

> women's works are evaluated and institutionalized as female-school literature in this [Japan's] heavily male-dominated literary milieu, meaning that if a writer is not recognized as one of the major writers by bundan[2] male critics, she is more than likely not to be included in the canon of Japanese literature (Ariga Chieko M. in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 46).

During the Heian period, a host of court ladies, including Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shoonagon among others, wrote diaries and fictional tales depicting court life, especially love relationships between men and women (Ariga Chieko M. in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 44). As the descriptions in these diaries and tales of the royal family and aristocrats were mere portrayals of high court life and, thus, contained nothing offensive regarding the positions of men and women in society, and, in addition, are among the few accounts of court life, they were admitted into the Japanese literary canon.

Nowadays, although they continue to face severe censorship and criticism from their male colleagues, women writers like Kyoko Mori and

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[2] Men active in the elite Tokyo coterie. (Fujimura-Fanselow 45)

Sawako Ariyoshi deal with real-life problems associated with woman- or motherhood rather than depicting, either the life of women according to Confucian principles; that is, as wives and mothers, or male ideas of female beauty as Kawabata and Tanizaki as well as other male writers frequently do.

A historical view of Japanese women's life

Junichiro Tanizaki lived from 1886 to 1965. He made his literary debut in 1910. The Great Tokyo Earthquake in 1923 marked a turning point in Tanizaki's career when he moved from the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Tokyo to the more traditional Kansai area. His writing which formerly had explored his own sexual conflicts, now focused on fabricated tales showing his appreciation of traditional Japanese concepts of beauty, especially that of women. Tanizaki displayed a preoccupation with women. He depicted them in various different roles, as protective, nurturing mother, as creatures of pure beauty, or as purely sensual creatures causing unending temptations to men. The Makioka Sisters was written during World War II. The serialization began in 1943 and the work was completed in 1948 despite its suspension by military authorities during the war. The background for the novel was taken from his own as well as his third wife's family. The novel depicts the decline of a once proud and prosperous family and is "an elegy to a bygone era, an exaltation of 'beauty in ruin'" (Kodansha Encyclopedia 342/3).

The Japanese ie[3], or family system in force in Japan at the time The Makioka Sisters took place and still very much embedded in Japan's society today, set forth that "the patriarchal head of the family (usually the eldest son) held an unquestionable authority over the rest of the family" (Kaneko, Sachiko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 4). This delegation of power into the hands of male family members or even adopted son-in-laws, as is the case in The Makioka Sisters, tells of the suffering women were subjected to because of the ie system's being in place. They found themselves trapped in

[3] The literal translation of ie is house or household. The ie system, a family network of relationships, was established in 1898 by the Civil Code.

this tight system of male dominance and power which extended beyond the immediate family to society as a whole, stripped of virtually every prerogative to make decisions, even if they concerned themselves. The ie had the right, and the power, to determine a woman's future. The family was involved in finding a suitable husband for their female relative and once a woman had married into another family:

> a woman had very few legal rights. When she married she entered her husband's family ..., and control of her property was transferred to her husband. Custody of children was held by the father exclusively. A husband's illegitimate sons ... had prior rights to the family estate over legitimate daughters. For this reason women were expected to produce male heirs (Kaneko, Sachiko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 5).

The family's, as well as society's power to coerce women was especially noticeable as far as marriage was concerned. A woman was not allowed to get married merely because she wanted to; rather she had to obtain the approval of the family head who frequently, as in Yukiko's case, found something wrong with the marriage candidate. Often times, especially in higher-class families, the candidate did not meet the standards of the family giving away the bride and the woman had to go through another omiai[4] in the hope of finding a husband. The matter of omiai was another, often times highly humiliating process for a young woman trying to find a partner with whom she would spend the rest of her life. Not only did "a bride who has arrived at her new household through omiai know little if anything about her husband, and given his emotional alliance with her mother-in-law, ... is , in fact, shut out emotionally..." (Hamabata 146) from her new household, but, in addition, she was more than likely treated as a mere commodity during the

[4] An omiai, also informally called miai is an arranged meeting between essentially two households. A man and a woman ready to get married, as well as other family members get together with the intention of finding a suitable marriage partner.

proceedings of the omiai, as the "future" bride had to be made presentable to the other side involved in the arrangements. It was not so much a woman's character that most men were interested in by trying to make a marriage match, but rather a woman's "looks , training, and talent" (Tanizaki 260) and the ability to make a good housewife and mother. "Even at the present, with more than half of all married women working in some capacity outside the house, most men continue to regard housework and child raising as "woman's work" and want wives who will follow and be devoted to them as well as cater to them" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 185). Women taking part in omiai almost seemed like products to be displayed to potential "buyers" and, thus, had to look their very best. This becomes especially clear in Yukiko's older sisters concern over a dark spot on Yukiko's face:

> What worried Sachiko most was going out with Yukiko when the spot showed. Yukiko was their marketable article, and it was not only at miai that they had to consider who might be looking at her. They wished she would stay at home for the week or so when the spot was expected to be darkest; or, if she must go out, that she would try to hide it (Tanizaki 52/3).

As can be seen from the above, the woman's family was extremely involved and interested in making their "product" seem as desirable as possible. The importance of an omiai lay not only in the woman hopefully making a "good match," that is finding a kind husband, but also in the family's striving to protect its reputation which could be severely damaged if any one of their female relatives was to make either a bad match, or worse, no match at all.

It was a widely held notion that Japanese women should, if at all possible, get married. If a woman turned out to be unmarriageable, this would reflect onto the family in as far as they had "produced" a hai missu, a spinster nobody wanted. Sachiko shows her concern for these social pressures

when she is thinking about the humiliation her and her husband already had to suffer because of Yukiko:

> No doubt Yukiko disliked the thought of having dinner with a man she did not know well, but did she feel no obligation to Sachiko -- more important to Teinosuke? If she would only consider the embarrassment and the humiliation Teinosuke and Sachiko had endured ... (Tanizaki 411).

Thus, the pressure on Japanese women to get married was extremely high. It was thought that "the ideal Japanese woman used to be one who married and raised children. Women's happiness was thought to lie in marriage" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 184). And, moreover, "in the past, when a woman faced difficulties in achieving economic independence, marriage was a form of social security for many women" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 184). A female who remained single after she had reached a certain age not only shed a negative light on her family, but also exposed herself to contempt and ridicule from society at large. She was considered unmarriageable and would probably remain for the rest of her life an urenokori[5], an unsold good, the laughing matter of society. Kittredge Cherry looked deeper into the phenomenon of the disparaging names women are called if they do not find a husband in her work Womansword:

> Although few Japanese choose to stay single for life, there is a large and devilishly clever arsenal of Japanese words for ridiculing people -- specifically women -- who remain unwed past the so-called marriageable age... . The older unmarried woman is "unsold merchandise" ... She has become a "widow without going" ... Some people tried to phrase her embarrassing situation politely in a foreign tongue by calling

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[5] Japanese woman who remains unmarried after having passed a certain age. Nowadays the age for Japanese women to get married lies around 26. However, with more and more women remaining single the term urenokori is losing its force.

> her "old miss" ... None of these words refer to bachelors ... (136/7).

Tanizaki takes this notion of women's need to get married even further in his novel by considering the possibility of a woman's physical suffering being caused by her incompleteness, that is, without a husband. The Makioka family, concerned about Yukiko's marriage ability:

> had been told by the doctor at Osaka University, ... that a long series of injections would be necessary, and that since the spot would disappear in any case when Yukiko was married, it was hardly worth the trouble (Tanizaki 334).

Considering these pressures on both the family and the woman herself, I think it does only seem natural that Sachiko, who was concerned for her sister's well-being and happiness as well as her family's good name, would utter the following in complete despair:

> I only hope someone will marry her. It hardly matters who any more. Even if it ends in divorce, I hope someone will marry her (Tanizaki 387).

Marriage, in many cases, was very much considered to be a matter of family business, to be conducted in a "businesslike manner" (Tanizaki 55). The woman who was to become the future bride had virtually no chance to become involved in the question of who she was to marry. Not by chance did Tatsuo, the husband of Yukiko's eldest sister and, thus, head of the Makioka household responsible for all major decisions to be made, turn out extremely perplexed when Yukiko herself said "No!" to a proposal he himself had arranged: "It had not occurred to him that the lady herself might object" (Tanizaki 10). Once a suitable candidate had been found women's personal feelings were hardly taken into consideration. The woman was supposed to comply to whatever her family said. As Matthews Hamabata shows in his work on love in Japanese business families, the woman "may have no other

choice ... She was compelled to think about her family of birth" (121). Marriage was not considered to be a bond formed out of mutual feelings of affection or love, quite to the contrary:

> marriage, a social bond, was "artificial": its meaning derived almost entirely from societal expectations, from the structure of duties and obligations. Love in marriage, the meeting of society's expectations, was different from ren'ai, which was passionate, sexual, natural (Hamabata 161).

The fact that Tatsuo was completely taken aback by Yukiko's objection to the marriage proposal he had made for her points to another restriction women suffer from in the ie system. Control over their lives is taken entirely from their hands and, a male, usually the head of the household is placed in charge of their lives and actions, as a guardian so to speak. The control this male individual exerts over the female members of his family is absolute and should be considered unquestionable as, if the women protested or went against his orders, "he did not have to support them" (Kaneko, Sachiko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 4). Hence, most women, dependent, for the most part, on the income of men, had no choice but to comply to the orders of the male household leader. This dependency on men continued, for most women, until the end of their lives, unless they managed to somehow support themselves without relying on their families' help. They would also have to bear the hardship of living under constant pressure from society for not fulfilling their feminine identity as mother and wife but instead having left the safe haven of dependence on men, making a living for themselves. In such cases, of a women leaving her family in order to make it on her own, Japanese society wondered, just as much as Okubabta, Taeko's suitor did,

> why should a girl from a good family want to earn money by taking in sewing? She is going to be married soon, and a girl who is going to be married ought to stop worrying about herself. I may not be very dependable, but I have no intention

> of letting her starve. I would rather she stopped pretending to be a working woman (Tanizaki 155).

It was considered normal for women to be absolutely dependent on the ie while they were still unmarried, or later on their husband. "Women and men occupied positions of extreme inequality under the Meiji Civil Code. Men had priority in all areas" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 188). And since the ie system was based on Confucian principles, a governance-obedience relationship, particularly concerning women abiding by the rule of men, pervaded the family structure (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 187).

Another aspect of women's lives in higher-class Japanese families portrayed by Tanizaki in The Makioka Sisters, was the importance that was placed on family standing. It was perceived as rather natural that women should, under no circumstances at all, socialize with, or worse, have a relationship with individuals, especially men, of lower class standing. Socializing with the wrong people could taint a woman's prospects for a good marriage, that is, a marriage with the son of another well-off family. This socially-accepted demand for propriety in a woman becomes quite evident when Yukiko's name, instead of her sister Taeko's, is printed as the person who has had an affair with a young man, and Tatsuo, the family head contemplates that:

> the harm to Yukiko ... was irreparable. A few people no doubt saw the revised newspaper story and knew that she had been maligned, but no matter how pure and proper she might be herself, it was now known what sort of sister she had, and, ... Yukiko presently found marriage withdrawing into the distance (Tanizaki 13).

The Makioka family was a proud family and would not give up their daughters to just anyone. In return they expected from their daughters the

same sort of discipline which would tell them not to associate too closely with people who are "beneath" them (Tanizaki 237). It was expected from a young maiden to preserve the dignity that she carried in her family name, and a love affair with someone from a lower class was a distinct sign of a lack of pride and could expand into a scandal involving the family and, worse, the family name. I think this point becomes very clear when Yoshizumi explains the significance which is attributed to the family name in Japan:

> the ie connotes a family group as well as a household that continues and is carried forth from generation to generation. It continues successively from past to future through ancestors and descendants; moreover, it is a conceptual and abstract family that continues on even when family members all die away (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 186).

Hence, if a single person of the household should be involved in a scandal, it would not merely be the life of this person that would be tainted but the lives of all members of the household, as they all carry the same name. Although this rule applied to both men and women, the pressure to conform to rules of propriety was much greater on women than it was on men. Men who had gone against the established principles of propriety had means of making a living for themselves and could simply leave or be forced to leave the household. Thus, the family hoped, people would forget about the scandal. Women who were, for the most part, not self-sufficient and thus depended on the family's support, had no such escape. Therefore, it was only natural for Sachiko, and probably the rest of the Makioka family as well, to wonder what had gotten into Taeko when they found out about her affair with Itakura, the member of "a class with which they had nothing in common" (Tanizaki 237). "Whatever mistakes Koi-san had made in the past, had she

no pride? However faded and fallen, was she not always a Makioka" (Tanizaki 237)?

Tanizaki did not merely depict the upper-class activities and arrangements of a Japanese family in The Makioka Sisters but also, much like Kawabata did in Snow Country, incorporated in the novel his personal idealizations of beauty in both the Japanese traditions as well as in Japanese women. The setting of The Makioka Sisters in the old Japanese city of Osaka, could be explained by the fact that Tanizaki "became an admirer of classical Japanese culture, he made his permanent residence in the Kyoto-Osaka area, where many of the old ways had been preserved. Divorced twice by this time he married into an old Osaka family" (Ueda 62).

In the character of Yukiko, the not so young maiden, whom the family desperately tries to match up with a man of good standing, Tanizaki embodies his personal projection of feminine beauty and class. Tanizaki portrayed Yukiko as: "a woman who believed in the neo-Confucian moral codes and who was therefore bound by them -- a woman of bygone days who was reserved in all things, who was taught to suppress her feelings on all occasions, and who seldom showed her face to any person of the opposite sex" (Ueda 57). Much like Tanizaki's own wife, and probably inspired by her, Yukiko "has in her manner and appearance so much of old Japan" (Ueda 62). She is almost always dressed in traditional Japanese dress and, in contrast to her younger sister Taeko, she embraces the Confucian-based tradition of filial piety: " 'I think we should wait.' Yukiko, always very proper, would not get into the cab ahead of an older sister" (Tanizaki 28). Yukiko is depicted as the idealized Japanese maiden. Although she is not young anymore, she has preserved her maidenly innocence:

> Teinosuke was being modest when he said that his sister-in-law had been reared in an outmoded manner. The fact was that Yukiko could never really be in the modern world. She would therefore always retain something pure and maidenly (Tanizaki 419).

Brought up as a daughter-in-a-box, sheltered from all possible negative influences, Yukiko has never ventured independently beyond the realm of activities of her family:

> Yukiko, fond though she was of the movies, was always reluctant to go out alone. She was extremely shy for her rather mature years, and she wanted someone to be with her on the most trivial errands (Tanizaki 384).

Yukiko is in fact so utterly helpless when it comes to speaking with people unfamiliar to her, that she even proves herself incapable of taking the call of a man who is a possible candidate as her future husband (Tanizaki 308).

Taeko, in contrast to her timid older sister, is a rebellious young woman defying the confinements of the traditional Japanese household. In her, Tanizaki incorporated his interest in "infidelity, jealousy, hatred, cruelty, and other dubious emotions that, he believed, were part of every woman's basic psychological makeup" (Ueda 58).

Taeko adamantly refuses to be like her "shut-in-sisters" (Tanizaki 266) who depend on their husbands for a livelihood. She apparently rejects the societal idea that women should be with a man and decides to make a living on her own, selling hand-made Japanese dolls and making dresses. Working despite the discontent her oldest sister's husband shows, Taeko "was quite confident that she would soon be able to stand alone" (Tanizaki 157). Taeko is independent and does as she pleases. Having been told that she ought to stop trying to be a working woman and instead have it as her goal to make a good marriage when the time comes, and to become a good wife and mother Taeko is almost outraged at the arrogance of her brother-in-law:

> Taeko said that she was no longer a child, that she did not need the guidance of any Tatsuo, that she understood her affairs better than anyone else. And what was so wrong with a woman who worked? The people in Tokyo still worried about family and position, and it seemed to them a disgrace that the Makioka family should produce a seamstress. But was that not ridiculously old-fashioned (Tanizaki 262)?

Taeko is struggling to break out of the regulations and expectations the ie tries to restrain her with. She is not at all concerned about preserving the honor of the family's name, and her rebellious thinking eventually leads to her being expelled from the family.

Also represented in Taeko's character is Tanizaki's attraction to the beauty of cruelty:

> in the kingdom of Tanizaki's fiction, women markedly outweigh men in importance, because he thought of them as creatures of the darkness, belonging to the subconscious. Female beauty as worshipped by Tanizaki inevitably becomes equivocal: a woman who treats her lover sadistically or who seduces her son is always pictured as supremely beautiful (Ueda 70).

Taeko's rudeness and vulgarity gives the first indication that Taeko may not be as chaste a woman as her family would like her to be. Her shamelessness is a disgrace to the family:

> It bothered her little to display herself naked, and sometimes, even before the maids, she would bare her bosom to the electric fan, or she would come from the bath like a tenement woman (Tanizaki 265).

However, Taeko was not just shameless but also had the characteristics of an idealized Tanizaki character portraying the beauty of cruelty. She takes advantage of her long-time suitor Okubata who is so entirely mesmerized by her that he will do anything for her, including stealing from his own family's jewelry store. Taeko uses several men this way, alluring them with her

sexuality. She is the perfect image of a seductress taking advantage of men's sexual instincts.

Once again female characters of idealized beauty, in this case Tanizaki's idealizations, are used to please the male fantasy. Taeko is reduced to a woman driven by purely animalistic instincts, the fantasy of many men driven by masochistic tendencies. Yukiko, on the other hand is the perfect image of the subservient young maiden, untainted by the evil of this world.

A preservationist view of traditional Japanese society and the role of women

Kawabata was born in 1899 and died a suicidal death in 1972. He was the only Japanese ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was a member of the Neosensualist school, a literary group with foreign models, such as startling images and abrupt transitions which Kawabata showed himself very fond of. In addition, he was also a student of Japanese literature which can be seen in his sad themes and frequent ellipses (Kodansha Encyclopedia 175). Kawabata Yasunari "was a cultural nationalist who sought to preserve the [Japanese] world of tradition." In his many novels he tried to capture the essential beauty of most of Japan's cultural traditions like the tea ceremony, No masks, the game of Go, the old capital of Kyoto, and finally, the world of hot-spring resorts and old-fashioned, compliant Japanese beauties in Snow Country (DeVere Brown 379). Snow Country was published in several different magazines beginning in 1935. It first appeared in book form in 1937, but since Kawabata was not satisfied with it, additions were made and the final version as we know it today was not published until 1948. Kawabata is known for composing his works episode after episode over long amounts of time as well as for the inconclusiveness of his final episode, as can be seen in Snow Country. One of the main themes underlying Snow Country is the discovery of beauty. As Ueda says, "To Kawabata, an artist was a seeker and discoverer of beauty. More specifically, a writer was a person who recorded his encounters with beauty. Snow Country is a record of such encounters" (175). Kawabata relates to his readers the beauty of the nature of his home country Japan; more importantly, however, he praises the natural, virginal beauty which he finds in Japanese women.

Although Snow Country is a novel describing Japan of the past, many of the stipulations made about the role of women in society and their identity still hold true today, at least to a certain degree. For example, the idealization of beauty and compliance found in women is something that Japanese men have always showed themselves as being very fond of. Kawabata continued this convention of the idealization of beauty and subservience in women by having his beautiful female protagonists partake in traditional feminine roles and taken advantage of by men, Shimamura in this case. Shimamura, for the most part, neglects the fact that women are more than merely pretty faces and sensuous bodies men can look at and touch, but complex human beings with feelings that can be hurt. In trying to vent energy he accumulated on a trip into the mountains, he looks upon the geisha who is called to please him as a mere commodity:

> To him this woman was an amateur. His desire for a woman was not of a sort that would make him want this particular woman - it was something to be taken care of lightly and with no sense of guilt (Kawabata 23).

By having his male protagonist act in such a way, Kawabata creates an allegory of the always compliant woman, rather than a real-life woman. He turns the female character into a symbol for the male ideal of a woman, thus depriving her of the full variety of women's potential and depicting only the beautiful, and subordinate side of women. This denial of a woman's dignity as a person is still found today in Japan's pornographic culture. Female bodies are separated from the character and personality of their owners, treating women as mere sex objects (Funabashi, Kuniko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 255).

Shimamura's true contempt for women and their sensitivity is expressed when Shimamura, after having spent a few days in the mountains, asks Komako to call him a geisha. At her disgust over his request he remarks:

> "What is there to be excited about? I'm too healthy after a week in the mountains, that's all. I keep having the wrong ideas." ... Shimamura had come to a point where he knew he was only parading his masculine shamelessness, and yet it seemed likely enough that the woman was familiar with the failing and need not to be shocked by it (Kawabata 21).

Women, it is implied, should be used to the idea that their gender is there only to serve and please the needs of male society.

In Snow Country's two female characters, Kawabata captured two very traditional images of Japanese women, the geisha and the young maiden. Komako is the perfect representation of a Japanese geisha or mistress:

> Geisha embody precisely those aspects of femininity that are absent from, or only incidental to, the role of wife. Where a wife is modest, a geisha is risqué. A wife is socially reticent; a geisha is witty and talkative. If a wife lacks romantic or sensuous appeal, a geisha, whether she sleeps with a man or not, has a certain sexual allure and can be an object of fantasy. The wife is devoted to her home and family. A geisha has no such ties (Crihfield Dalby 171).

Komako is probably younger than Shimamura's wife, more sensually attractive, and more accomplished in music and dance. However, Komako is far from the epitome of the subordinate woman always ready and willing to please a man. She is still young; and alive in her, as well as in Yoko, is the image of the maiden which has "traditionally focused on purity, innocence, and virginal beauty" (Ueda, The Mother of Dreams 8). Much concerned about preserving her maidenly propriety, Komako, for a long time, fights Shimamura's attempts to seduce her into giving up her innocence to him and, thus, making her his. Ueda also points out that "pure, innocent beauty is fragile" (8). This fragility and transience of a young maiden's beauty is

referred to when Shimamura is thinking about the floating image of Yoko's face superimposed on the passing landscape. "He wondered whether the flowing landscape was not perhaps symbolic of the passage of time" (Kawabata 14) which is accompanied by the destruction of beauty. Kawabata was among the many modern writers who were concerned, not only with the depiction of maidens, but also with "showing how [their beauty] is destroyed or transformed into something less beautiful as the maiden grows up and enters the world of adults" (Ueda, The Mother of Dreams 8). The tragic end Yoko meets at the conclusion of Snow Country is possibly the best example of the destruction or transformation a young maiden necessarily experiences growing up into adulthood:

> A line of water from one of the pumps arched down on the smoldering fire, and a woman's body suddenly floated up before it: such had been the fall. The body was quite horizontal as it passed through the air. Shimamura started back -- not from fear, however. He saw the figure as a phantasm from an unreal world. That stiff figure, flung out into the air, became soft and pliant. With a doll-like passiveness, and the freedom of the lifeless, it seemed to hold both life and death in abeyance (Kawabata 173).

Women in Kawabata's novel Snow Country are being placed on a pedestal, thereby having taken from them their role as acting participants in life and being turned into objects who are being acted upon and looked at. Even the sexuality of the women in Kawabata's novel is artificial. It is entirely male-generated and designed for the mere reason to please men:

> Always ready to give himself up to reverie, he could not believe that the mirror floating over the evening scenery and the other snowy mirror were really works of man. They were part of nature, and part of some distant world (Kawabata 57).

By creating these artificial beauties, it appears to me that Kawabata, in his novel, makes women who do not meet the high standard of beauty he has

created subject to ridicule and contempt emanating from his male protagonist Shimamura:

> One look at the seventeen- or eighteen-year-old geisha who was presently led in, and Shimamura felt his need for a woman fall dully away. ... Shimamura, at pains not to show that his interest had left him, faced her dutifully, but he could not keep himself from looking less at her than at the new green on the mountains behind her. It seemed almost too much of an effort to talk (Kawabata 28/9).

Admittedly, nowadays these stipulations about the necessity for women to be beautiful have vanished for the greatest part from Japanese society, and even Shimamura realizes that his contempt for women who do not meet the beauty of Komako is "rather repulsive" (Kawabata 32). Nevertheless, the acceptability for men to keep a mistress, described by Kawabata in a very matter-of-factly way, is still viable, even today. In Japan of old, before the time during which Snow Country was taking place, "it was considered socially acceptable and even necessary for a man to keep one or more mistresses as a way of ensuring a successor. Keeping mistresses also symbolized wealth, high status, and authority" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 188). Although in 1882 the practice of keeping mistresses for sexual service was abolished by law (Ueda, The Mother of Dreams 11), the notion that women are mere toys to be cast aside once one is done playing persisted, to a certain degree, even until Kawabata's time, as is reflected in Snow Country:

> He could not understand how she had so lost herself. All of Komako came to him, but it seemed that nothing went out from him to her. He heard in his chest, like snow piling up, the sound of Komako, an echo beating against empty walls. And he knew that he could not go on pampering himself forever (Kawabata 155).

Shimamura's interest in Komako seemed to have stemmed from a strong fascination with her beauty that was still untainted. As long as Komako remained persistent in preserving her innocence and propriety she seemed alluring to Shimamura. However, once she gave up her barrier and allowed Shimamura to take from her what seemed to be sacred, that is, her virginity, Shimamura appears to lose his interest in her almost instantly. When Komako realizes that he is simply using her and accuses him of doing so, Shimamura thus contemplates:

> He stayed not because he could not leave Komako nor because he did not want to. He had simply fallen into the habit of waiting for those frequent visits. ... He thought of going to see the Chijimi country. That excursion might set him on his way toward breaking away from this hot spring (Kawabata 154/5).

He had used Komako, now he would leave her.

Kawabata, who was interested in depicting pure life in his novels, believed that:

> It is energy generated by striving after an ideal. To use his favorite word, it is a longing. ... A typical Kawabata hero longs for something so distant that it seems unattainable. ... life burns more purely, more beautifully, when it longs for a distant ideal. The ideal may not be attainable, but the effort to attain it is beautiful (Ueda 177).

I think that Kawabata's focus on loneliness and longing, as reflected in Komako as well as Shimamura, could be accounted for by the fact, that he "was orphaned at two and lost even his grandfather at fifteen, living a lonely life in school dormitories" (DeVere Brown 375). Having lost his mother at such a crucial time in his psychological development, Kawabata seems never to have been fully separated from his mother which could have caused his inability to develop the feminine side of his personality. Thus, manifested in the character of Shimamura seems to be Kawabata's very own inability to be

emotional and to lead constructive relationships with women. Shimamura is the epitome of the intellectual, rational being looking at all of life as mere theory. This includes not only the Occidental Ballet he never went to see, but extends to women as well. Shimamura is interested in studying Komako's and Yoko's beauty and sensuality from a safe distance. Thus, when Komako, in a desperate attempt to win his love, gives up her innocence to him, Shimamura, almost repelled at such a close encounter with something that should have remained theory, retreats, leaving Komako to think that she had been used. Komako is portrayed as the male ideal of the typical woman; that is, very domestic and not very knowledgeable, so as not to intimidate the men she is with:

> She was quite indiscriminate and had little understanding of literature, ... Her manner was as though she were talking of a distant foreign literature. There was something sad in it, something that rather suggested a beggar who has lost all desire (Kawabata 42).

However, in contrast to Shimamura, Komako is living life to the fullest, investing all her energy and hopes in the attempt to win Shimamura's love and affection. Kawabata's exploration of loneliness and his denigration of the search for emotional fulfillment associated with women seems to be reflected in the emotional suffering his two female characters, Komako and Yoko, undergo. Both women end up loving men who prove to be incapable of returning their honest and heart-felt emotions. To Kawabata, the inability to love, indicated in his male characters, must have seemed rather natural as he portrays Komako realizing: "... I can't complain. After all, only women are able really to love" (Kawabata 130).

Kawabata also found great delight in natural beauty and insisted that pure life, genuine vitality, purity of the wild, and sturdy vitality were the

attributes of best literary material (Ueda 176). Thus, in creating Snow Country's female protagonists, he succeeded to combine both his sense of loneliness and his longing for beauty. He created two beauties "to complement each other and create the fullness of womanhood" (Miyoshi 106). Komako which translated into English means 'girl like a colt,' (Miyoshi 106) is dynamic and fully alive. She is growing with time, discovering her own female sensuality as well as the pain women are destined to be caused by men. Often times during the novel Komako is associated with snow, giving expression to the purity and cleanliness she attempts to retain, as well as fire and the color red which is meant to reflect the insatiable fire burning in her and the infinite amount of love she holds inside of her:

> The white in the depths of the mirror was the snow, and floating in the middle of it were the woman's bright red cheeks. There was an indescribably fresh beauty in the contrast (Kawabata 48).

Yoko, on the other hand, is the perfection of a virginal beauty:

> Yoko is a 'nurse' to her lover, Yukio, who has been ill a long time and will soon die. She loves him intensely, all the more so because he is sexually impotent; in this way, her love keeps its maidenly purity (Ueda 178).

In her role as a virgin she is static and unchanging, "always eluding men's reaching hands" (Miyoshi 107). As Kawabata describes her, "Yoko's face was still there, but for all the warmth of her ministrations, Shimamura had found in her a transparent coldness" (11). The translation of her name, "girl of leaves," (Miyoshi 106) perfectly reflects her fragility and transparency in the eyes of Kawabata. These two aspects of her personality become even more evident when one looks at the fate Yoko encounters in her life. The first time she appears in the novel, the reader is already to find out that Yoko's identity is not really self-sustaining; she cannot exist on her own:

> 'The girl' - something in her manner suggested the unmarried girl. Shimamura of course had no way of being sure what her relationship was to the man with her. They acted rather like a married couple. The man was ill, however, and illness shortens the distance between a man and a woman. The more earnest the ministrations, the more the two come to seem like husband and wife. A girl taking care of a man far older than she, for all the world like a young mother, can from a distance be taken for his wife (Kawabata 6).

In this passage, Yoko passes through three different identities; the innocent young maiden, the wife, and the mother. However, each one of these identities is dependent upon the existence of the man she nurses, Yukio. It seems to me that Kawabata, thus, makes the statement that women's identity cannot continue without men. Yukio, by being alive and having Komako nurse him, clearly defines Yoko's relationship to men, which is important to society. Women receive either respect or contempt from society depending on their relationship with men. The most respect is awarded to those virtuous women who realize that their place is by the side of a man: "as a wife and mother, a Japanese woman attains the highest possible social approbation" (Crihfield Dalby 171). Those women who do not have a clearly defined relationship are being held in contempt. This becomes apparent in the Japanese language where words denouncing women who are still unmarried after the so-called marriageable age, such as urenokori or "unsold goods," are still in existence and use (Cherry 136). It is assumed that it is not right for them, not to be married or in an otherwise defined relationship with a man; they are being stripped of their right to own their own feelings and desires. Yoko also meets her inevitable destiny associated with the end of her relationship to men. Once Yukio dies and Yoko's symbolic marriage with him comes to an end, Yoko loses her defined identity. She becomes an utterly useless being without a man by her side and, inevitably, her loss of identity or

self leads to insanity. Japanese women's options in life, according to this view of women's destiny portrayed by Kawabata, are limited to two -- either complete subordination to men or loss of self.

Komako, on the contrary, is depicted as a geisha, apparently quite capable of living on her own. Komako apparently decided to become a geisha in order not to have to succumb to traditional sex roles which would have rendered her dependent on a man's money. Having decided to do so, however, Komako does not realize until it is too late, that even in her role as geisha, a working woman, she is pinned down into a timeless construct of women designed to please men. This confinement of the geisha at the whim of male desire is represented in a Haiku written by a Shimbashi geisha:

Whatever,
As you like it.
The willow
(Crihfield Dalby 190).

Komako, in her role as a geisha, is now more than ever dependent on the goodwill of men and, like the willow in the wind, entirely subordinate to their every wish:

> "I hated it." That sudden torrent of words came at him again. "You said I was a good woman, didn't you? You're going away. Why did you have to say that to me?" ... I cried about it. I cried again after I got home. I'm afraid to leave you. But please go away. I won't forget that you made me cry" (Kawabata 166).

Komako is trapped; trying to live up to both her own desires and Shimamura's expectations of her; she finds that she is incapable of conforming to any one of them. In addition, society is looking down on her for being a working woman, a geisha whose only purpose it is to please men with her artistic talent and sexual favors. She is held in contempt by the many housewives who are trapped at home with children, knowing that

their husbands are being pampered by some woman who has far surpassed their own potential.

Shimamura's expectations are even more difficult to satiate since he is not really sure himself of what he wants from Komako. Taking into consideration that he treats the mountain geisha as mere commodities, supposed to be ready at his call, one can assume he likes women to be subservient and compliant. However, deep inside of Shimamura there is also a strong longing for the capacity to be emotional. Using the friendship he and Komako had established, he hopes to attain this capacity for emotional fulfillment. At times, Komako even seems to be successful in giving him the emotional fulfillment he is so much longing for:

> Taken with a feeling almost of reverence, washed by waves of remorse, defenseless, quite deprived of strength - there was nothing for him to do but give himself up to the current, to the pleasure of being swept off wherever Komako would take him (Kawabata 71).

However, in the end when Shimamura discovers Komako's true intention, which is to win his love, he is deeply afraid. He seems to be unable to perceive that Komako herself has not yet attained emotional fulfillment. Quite on the contrary, is plagued with feelings of failure for not having conformed to her feminine identity. She proved to be incapable of being faithful to Yukio the man who loved her and once he became incurably ill, the only remedy she found to pacify her own desire for independence as well as society's expectations on her as his fiancee was to become a geisha, in order to make sure that she would at least be able to pay for his medical bills. Desperately in need to withdraw from this situation of female dependence on him, Shimamura finds fault with Komako's loss of self and rejects her:

> It was almost too ordinary a thing to hear gossip about geisha from the hot-spring masseuse, and that fact had the perverse

> effect of making the news the more startling; and Komako's having become a geisha to help her fiancé was so ordinary a bit of melodrama that he found himself almost refusing to accept it (Kawabata 61).

Komako, on the other hand, is so torn between these multiple expectations of her, that she is incapable of owning her own desires in the end. Although she realizes that, in order for her dream of wife- and motherhood to ever come true, she must preserve her propriety, she falls deeper and deeper in love with Shimamura. Knowing that he will never love her back, she continues on her path, becoming subject to a type of masochistic love. Her destiny, it appears, is to follow Shimamura like "a beaten dog." She, thus, becomes the perfect example of a woman's obsession and suffering in a relationship with a nihilistic and emotionally unavailable man (Ariga, Chieko M. in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 50). Unwilling to face Shimamura's rejection of her, Komako keeps on living in her dream of a secure future with a man who loves her by her side, sinking deeper and deeper into a state of complete dependence:

> Then she closed her eyes, and began again as if she had asked herself whether Shimamura knew her, felt her for what she was, and had answered that he did. 'Once a year is enough. You'll come once a year, won't you, while I'm here' (Kawabata 103)?

She is disappointed by Shimamura's withdrawal once he learned of her attempt to find a man to depend on in him. Moreover, she is deeply humiliated by the fact that she, as well as all other women, are merely being used. However, instead of breaking up her destructive relationship with Shimamura, she finds her destiny in being trapped forever in her role as the subservient geisha now that Shimamura has taken her innocence, "the naked heart of a woman calling out to her man" (Kawabata 34).

Japanese women and their role in the care of the elderly

The author, Sawako Ariyoshi, grew up under the influence of a mother who promoted feminist groups (Mulhern 8). She is a graduate of Tokyo Women's Christian University where she majored in English literature. She is recognized for persistent emphasis on prevailing social issues (Kodansha Encyclopedia 86). Ariyoshi experienced first-hand the hardship which a large number of women in Japan have to face, living with their husbands' parents -- after two years of marriage she could bear no more, decided to let her career prevail over her marriage and got a divorce (Mulhern 10). In The Twilight Years Ariyoshi addresses problems not necessarily of the same nature as her own and brings them to a conclusion far different from her own drastic measure, but possibly more common among Japanese women in general.

Celeste Loughman, in her article "The Twilight Years: A Japanese View of Aging, Time, and Identity," describes Sawako Ariyoshi's novel as one which challenged the Confucian ideal and "called attention to the growing number of elderly and the problems of caring for them" (49). However, The Twilight Years is far more than a novel merely addressing the problems of the aged and infirmed and their families in Japan. It is also an account of the lives of many Japanese women.

Ariyoshi starts her novel out with a stereotypical image of Japanese women, a housewife: "Akiko emerged from the subway station carrying a large shopping bag in each hand" (Ariyoshi 7). The reader is soon to find out, however, that Akiko and her way of life do not harmonize with the characteristics traditionally ascribed to a housewife and mother. Instead, she is among the many Japanese women who decided to confront the enormous

challenge of combining their marriage and family life with careers. As Fujimura-Fanselow points out in Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives of the Past, Present, and Future:

> A major problem for women who wish to continue in their careers even after they marry, and particularly after they have children, is that so often they are forced to take on almost single-handedly the double burden of career plus housekeeping, child care, and, increasingly, care of the elderly (146).

Indeed, the task of fulfilling the demands of both career and family often times poses insurmountable obstacles for many Japanese women. In fact, a great many of them have no choice but to chose one option over the other, leaving them either without a career or without a family. The problem of women having to bear the bulk of responsibility within the home while at the same time holding a job (Fujimura-Fanselow, Kumiko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 147) is due, not only to the attitude displayed by many Japanese men who insist that:

> It's fine for wives to work, so long as they continue to perform all of the necessary household chores and take care of children so that I don't have to take on any of those responsibilities (Fujimura-Fanselow, Kumiko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 146).

but also, to a large extent, to pressures exerted by society as a whole. Reinforced "by the Confucian philosophy that men and women are not openly to interact in public or to switch social roles once they reach the age of seven" (Loeb Adler 175), traditional sex role differentiation in Japan specifies that men earn the money while women manage the household. These sex-role specifications leave a large number of Japanese women in the unbearable position of having to conform with societal expectations which charge that women should remain in the home tending to their husband and children.

Women who want to go beyond the traditionally assigned realm of the home are often subject to scrutiny and criticism from immediate family members as well as society at large. Akiko herself recalls having faced this kind of criticism from her father-in-law:

> Yet it was only because - against her father-in-law's wishes - she had a job, that she could afford to make such an expensive purchase. It pained her to recall how often Shigezoo had sarcastically called her a 'working wife' (Ariyoshi 9).

For the most part, these women have to continue performing one hundred percent of the work accumulating at home as well, since it cannot be expected from husbands or children to offer their help. That would be a sign of support for the wife's/mother's decision to go outside of the home to work which almost indisputably will lead to at least some degree of neglect of her chores in the home. As White indicates in her article "Home Truths: Women and Social Change in Japan:"

> Domestic equity is an issue for women. The dual role is exhausting, for anyone, and women who work and maintain a family will have a 200 percent role, until the norms governing men's domestic and work lives change as well (72).

Women who do not live up to these societal pressures are either forced to give up their careers, or doomed to be subject to incessant criticism. Thus, women frequently find themselves caught between these pressures and their own, self-described goals and desires. These goals and desires call for a position in society which will give them a greater degree of self-fulfillment and self-worth than the roles of mother and wife offer. Many of these women would like help from their husbands in order to enable them to cope better with their tremendous workload:

> Akiko felt her anger rising. Nobutoshi expected her to take care of the old man's every need, even though Shigezoo was his father. Men always tried their utmost to avoid the

> troublesome details of running a household. ... Suddenly unable to suppress her emotions, Akiko hit her sleeping husband with the pillow she had been hugging. Nobutoshi awoke with a start.
> "What's happened?" he asked.
> "Nothing dear" (Ariyoshi 88).

Much like Akiko in the above quotation, most women dare not utter their feelings of frustration over being left with the burden of two jobs, since that would betray their own feminine role identification and cause them tremendous guilt. Akiko's frustration over being deprived of sleep night after night, because she has to take her father-in-law out to relieve himself, runs so extremely high that she vents her anger on her sleeping husband, only to find herself denying her true feelings immediately after when Nobutoshi wonders "What's happened?" Hence, instead of giving expression to their strong feelings of anger and frustration, many Japanese women neglect their own needs in order to manage their double burden, and, like Ariyoshi's protagonist, Akiko, they give up the little time their job allows them to carry on a social life aside from family and work:

> Akiko was convinced that in order to do both [household and job] she had to turn down all invitations to Saturday afternoon functions and spend the time doing her grocery shopping for the entire week (Ariyoshi 9/10).

Here, although Akiko's perspective mirrors the expectations her husband has of her, one can discern a certain sense of reluctance which may stem from Ariyoshi's own intuition and reflects in the character she created. Society, along with her husband, communicates to a woman that it is absolutely essential for women who work outside the home, to also remain in control of the work that has to be done at home; Akiko or Ariyoshi, respectively, is not entirely convinced of such a necessity, however.

The issue of women having to take on double responsibilities becomes even more strained when care of the elderly becomes involved. When Akiko realizes that her father-in-law's condition is such that he cannot be left by himself at all the fear that immediately enters her mind is:

> Was her husband about to tell her that she could not go to work and leave his father unattended? Would he also say that it was high time she stayed at home where she belonged (Ariyoshi 69)?

As Akiko's intuitive reaction indicates, this kind of thinking is not at all unrealistic for Japanese women. Still remaining in Japanese society is: "the ideology of the patriarchal stem family, based on Confucianism which gives men the status of the family head and gives women the status of dependents" (Sodei, Takako in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 216). Due to this assigned position of dependence and the implied inferiority of a woman, "it is always women who are supposed to stop working when someone in the family becomes sick or impaired" (Sodei, Takako in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 217). Akiko herself makes this realization at several points during Shigezoo's physical and mental decline, thinking that:

> As he was seriously ill, it was her duty to nurse him and, if necessary, to stay home from work, while her husband reported to his office. (Ariyoshi 179) ... she vowed to prolong his life for as long as she possibly could, knowing in her heart that she was the only one in the family who was able to do so (Ariyoshi 187).

The welling of such feelings of responsibility for the sick and the elderly in a woman are thought to be natural, rather than brought about by the expectations of a sex-segregated society. The conviction that women should not fight what is a natural role for them is represented in Takako Sodei's essay where she states that: "... caring is 'given' to women: it becomes the defining characteristic of their self-identity and their life's work" (Fujimura-

Fanselow and Kameda 217). Those women who do attempt to defy their "natural pre-destination" of a feminine identity, however, are said to soon realize, that they cannot uphold their defiance as they are being plagued by enormous feelings of guilt, not fulfilling what should be a natural feminine role for them. Akiko encounters this sense of guilt when she contemplates the possibility of sending her father-in-law to a nursing home: "she thought about Shigezoo's physical deterioration and felt guilty about sending him away from home so that she might be free to lead her own life" (Ariyoshi 212). However, Ariyoshi as well as Fujimura-Fanselow mark in their works that there is also a large number of women who do not allow for themselves to be trapped in the traditionally assigned positions of housewife, mother, and caregiver. They do not bow to the feeling of guilt which society attempts to instill in them:

> For the 95 percent of elderly who are cared for by families, the caregiver is a daughter or daughter-in-law. These women now lobby for a range of measures that they feel will improve their ability to give care, and their own lives. These include family care leave, information, reduction or modification of work hours, and financial aid (White 77/8).

Akiko herself, though caught up in her feminine role as Shigezoo's death is nearing, resents the assumption that the part she plays in the working world carries no special meaning and can, thus, be discarded at any time if necessary:

> Was it just for the money that she had worked all these years? Had her banging away at the typewriter been no different from the simple, repetitive tasks carried out by a factory worker day after day? Was it because they were incompetent that women were hired to perform menial tasks such as serving tea and typing - jobs that did not allow them to participate actively in society? Such thoughts filled Akiko with disgust. However small, her role at the office was by no means insignificant (Ariyoshi 70).

She attacks the widely-held assumption that women are incapable of being productive members of the working world and, therefore, are being placed into jobs that do not carry a lot of, if any, meaning. She rejects the notion that she, as well as other women, should merely be "Office Flowers," who must only be young and pretty so they may "serve as decorations for brightening and softening the predominantly masculine office environment. ... an office flower would never be burdened with duties heavier than serving tea, making copies, or answering the phone" (Cherry 105).

Sawako Ariyoshi, who had to resort to the drastic measure of divorce in order to attain acknowledgment of the significance of her work outside the home, tends to depict strong, progressive women like herself in her novels. They are women who challenge the Confucian ideal of filial piety and its manifold implications regarding the role of women. One such implication is, that either the daughter-in-law or the oldest daughter has to take care of the elderly (Loughman 50). Another Confucian-based premise states that women hold a place of inferiority to men in all aspects of life. The women challenging the Confucian principle and its implications do not permit society to oppress them with its old-fashioned assumptions about the role women ought to play and the recognition they should or should not be awarded for doing so. For example:

> Women's work at home was not highly valued, because it took place privately without being evaluated by others and because, of course, they could not make any money. In a capitalist society nonremunerative work could not be valued" (Sodei, Takako in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 216).

They struggle to retain their own belief in the meaningfulness of their work, both in and out of the home, and, in addition, attempt to gain respect from society as a whole for their tremendous efforts. Akiko, when looking back at

her mother-in-law's life as a slave to her husband, makes the statement: "a woman today would divorce a man like that after three days of such treatment" (Ariyoshi 35) and, thereby, gives expression to the sentiment prevailing among many other progressive Japanese women. They are tired of doing most of the work without ever receiving the slightest bit of praise or even recognition. Even women of old, like Mrs. Tachibana, who were raised under the premise that women were dependent on and inferior to men, take on a stance of independence and strength in Ariyoshi's novels. Defying the presumption that women's work is not worth anything and does not require the use of intelligent thought, Tachibana says the following in regard to Shigezoo's mental deterioration:

> Senility is a state of mind. They all say that Mr. Tachibana became senile because he didn't exercise his mind or his body. They also say that he was lazy. ... People used to think that men deteriorated physically while women became senile. It's not true! Women rarely become senile, because they use their brains - whether they're sewing or doing the laundry (Ariyoshi 104).

The judgment about women made in the above quote leads to the fact that in Japanese society "women's work is still [considered] a different category, as many male managers feel that women are not worth encouraging ..." (White 67). Male bosses watch with anxiety over the private lives of their female employees as it is a general assumption that women will leave the workplace either once they get married or when they have children:

> The two lawyers were worried, however, when they learned that the girl had a serious suitor. ... it was a different matter when their secretary began to think seriously about marriage. ... The two lawyers had felt uneasy from the start about having a young girl whose future was so uncertain (Ariyoshi 204).

The premise that women will leave the workforce soon after they have entered it is often embraced by the male leaders of Japan's essentially male-

oriented career structure. They take advantage of it, hiring women only to perform menial tasks or beautify their drab offices (Moeran 22). Many of these short-lived office flowers meet the same fate as Akiko who:

> previously ... had worked for a trading company where she had met and married Nobutoshi; however, she had to leave her job because the company did not approve of working wives (Ariyoshi 52).

Many women, thus, find themselves in positions with absolutely no prospects for a continued career, "taken out of the labour market in their mid 20s, only to re-enter it (if at all) in their mid 40s or 50s as poorly paid part-time workers" (Moeran 22). Others who are not forced to leave their jobs by their employers often times give in to continuing pressures from society and their spouses, asking them to give up their jobs and become full-time housewives and mothers, instead. Letting themselves be supported, they take on an inferior position, seemingly out of their own accord. A large number of these women soon realize, however, that the roles of housewife and mother are not enough to fulfill their need for self-actualization, only to find that they have given up their chance for a career by having left the labor market. Once again they are caught in part-time positions doing menial tasks.

Discrimination against women in the labor market is but one of the many inequalities between men and women in Japanese society Sawako Ariyoshi brings to light in The Twilight Years. She criticizes both the Confucian philosophy which, for the most part, is responsible for women's dependency on men in order to survive, as well as modern Japanese society which continues to carry on these discriminating principles established by Confucianism. Akiko brings forth one such inequity between men and women in Japanese society when she comes to realize that:

> her husband had never acknowledged the fact that with his salary alone they could not have finished paying off the loan they had taken out in order to build their house and the cottage. Both properties were in his name. It had never occurred to Nobutoshi to register both their names as legal owners ... Yet if Nobutoshi were to die suddenly, Akiko and Satoshi would have to pay an inheritance tax in order to keep the property. That would be utterly absurd, thought Akiko. Although a legal code extolling Equal Rights had been forced upon the Japanese ... the idea that family property was built up by the efforts of husband and wife was still not widely accepted (Ariyoshi 70).

In spite of all the negativity associated with the plight of Japanese women trapped in roles ascribed by society, Ariyoshi also succeeds in conveying the meaning women are able to find for themselves in transcending the confines of their roles and realizing the importance of providing and nurturing. Thus, The Twilight Years, in addition to being a novel describing the plight of women in modern Japan, is a story of women's ability to realize within them the human spirit which allows them to find meaning in a role which, previously, they had perceived as confining. The Twilight Years is the story of hope and compassion, held in the hands of Japan's women.

Due to the fact that Japanese men are hardly ever at home, women carry the responsibility for both Japan's youth as well as Japan's aged population. It is left to them and their compassion and love to bring children up as responsible members of society and ensure that the aged are not put away in homes where they will not receive the love and care they need to make the remainder of their lives as pleasant and fulfilling as it could be. As Yamagushi correctly realizes by saying: "I'm beginning to think that a man can't live without a woman, whatever his age. Being a man, it makes me feel both happy and sad" (Ariyoshi 197), women are the main players in the cycle of life, nursing both the youngest and the oldest:

> Patting him gently on the back, Akiko recalled an incident that had taken place ten years earlier. Satoshi had woken up in the middle of the night and, half asleep, had begun groping for her. Akiko had taken him into her bedding and spent the rest of the night with her arms around him. Now it was her father-in-law who had been searching for her (Ariyoshi 101).

Women occupy an important position in every station of every life, male and female. They give life; Japan's imperial family insists that it can trace its origins back to the sun-goddess Amaterasu; preserve and nurture it in their roles as wives and mothers, and they nurse the sick and elderly, directing them towards a fulfilled ending of the life cycle. Akiko realizes her role as mother and even though one may perceive a regression in Ariyoshi's female protagonist from a modern working woman to one remaining in the home conforming to traditional sex roles, Ariyoshi suggests that this development is not necessarily bad. Confucian-based traditions, which negatively affect the lives of Japanese women, persist even in today's modern Japanese society; and the past, with society's negligence to award due respect to women's roles in the home, does not seem to be easily cast aside. However, many of those women who do not try to regain the respect their female ancestors may have lost by working outside the home, come to realize that there is a great degree of meaning in the life of a housewife and mother. These are the women who are empowered to carry on the existence of humanity and bring hope and compassion into this world. They understand, like Akiko did, that work outside the home is not necessarily the key to their fulfillment and self-worth:

> Now that she went to work only three days a week, Akiko's take-home pay was smaller. On the other hand, she was warmly welcomed at the office and no longer felt depressed about the possibility of losing her job. The other four days she

> stayed at home and had all the time in the world to savour the little pleasures in life (Ariyoshi 197/8).

Their ability to preserve life and give meaning to it takes on greater importance for them. They find meaning and fulfillment in making the lives of others better. Not so much concerned with what they have lost by giving up their work outside the home anymore, these women come to appreciate the subtle signs of gratitude they receive for their hard work at home:

> Akiko had not told a soul how she had resolved to do her best to prolong her father-in-law's life for as long as possible. ... She knew full well that Shigezoo, who by some miracle had recovered from his recent illness, had gone far beyond the limits of old age. Since his recovery from pneumonia ... he always had an angelic smile on his face. Sitting by himself, from time to time, he would break out into a smile for no apparent reason. "Satoshi would smile like that right after he was born. ... The doctor called it a mindless smile. ... Grandpa's just like that... I wonder if that's what it's like for a man to become a god" (Ariyoshi 189).

A modern perspective on more non-traditional roles of Japanese women

Kyoko Mori, a Japanese American writer of the 1990s was born in Japan but left her country of birth in 1977 at the age of twenty. The story recounted in Shizuko's Daughter is essentially her own life story, as her mother committed suicide when Kyoko was twelve years old and a distant father and a mean stepmother drove her away from home. She is now married to an American and she is teaching at a University in Wisconsin (Mori, The Dream of Water 1). Kyoko Mori admits in her essay "Brave Outsiders: Multicultural Writers on Adolescence" that she:

> was always drawn to protagonists who were outsiders, who valued their own integrity over the approval of their peers, families, or teachers. Lonely but proud, these characters criticized the hypocrisies of the people around them.

Shizuko's Daughter is a novel telling the story of Yuki, a teenage Japanese girl who loses her mother to suicide and has to discover a way of coping with the guilt she feels. Furthermore, it is the story of many Japanese women who are unable to find fulfillment in their wearisome lives led in an oppressive patriarchal society and attempt to break out of the system of female dependence on men. The two protagonists in Shizuko's Daughter, Shizuko and her daughter Yuki, are two outsiders trapped in Japanese society which is dominated and run by males, according to male ideals. Shizuko is one of the many Japanese women who find nothing but unhappiness and loneliness in their marriages. The love she has held for him died long ago and the only thing she has left is respect for his masculinity which is ingrained in Japanese society. Her husband is always gone, working, socializing, or spending his time with his mistress. As Yoshizumi points out in Japanese Women - New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future:

> This typical Japanese husband in no way senses that he is neglecting his family. Rather, he believes that he is fulfilling the role of husband and father by earning wages to support his wife and children. In reality, however, he has very little time or emotional energy to give to his wife or children (185).

Deprived of any kind of emotional warmth from her husband, Shizuko withers away, alienated from everyone but her little daughter Yuki.

Wondering one day what it might have taken for her mother to lead a happy life in her role as mother and wife, Yuki comes to the following conclusion:

> In the folktales her mother read to her at night, animals often came back to the people who had rescued them. They brought treasures or granted wishes. Yuki wondered what her mother would have wished for if she had been the heroine of a story like that. Not money or treasure, she was sure (Mori 129). ... If the golden carp had come back to pay its debt, she thought, her mother would have wished for someone to love (Mori 134).

Trapped in a relationship with an unloving and unfaithful husband, Shizuko, like many other Japanese women, feels partly responsible for her husband's taking on a mistress due to his inability to be happy with her. She tries to convince herself that she has done everything in her power to make her husband happy, but there remains some doubt if she could not have tried a little harder. "Perhaps I haven't done so badly, she told herself as she thought of her fifteen years of marriage" (Mori 4). This remaining sense of ineptitude is due to Japanese society having indoctrinated women with the notion that it is their responsibility to maintain a healthy relationship with their husbands. Hence, if a woman's husband decides to cheat on her it is hardly ever considered to be his own fault but rather the woman's for having neglected her role as a good wife. Yuki's stepmother implies this reasoning

when she attempts to justify her new status as wife of Hideki, due to lack of devotion to her husband on the part of Shizuko:

> Yuki's mother must have spent hours embroidering flowers on these dresses and blouses to be worn only by a little girl ... No wonder her husband stayed away. As she sat alone night after night, sadness and craziness must have accumulated in her mind like dust, till her clogged-up mind made her turn on the gas in an empty house and suffocate to death (Mori 103).

Related to this assumption are societal expectations, demanding that women be faithful to their husbands under any circumstances, whereas it is considered quite natural if men find themselves mistresses. This inequity between men and women, established by a male-dominated society continues, at least for the older generations, even after the spouse's death. Women, having been able to rely on their husbands throughout their lives together, are expected to be faithful to their dead spouse for the rest of their lives, serving their dead spirit. On the other hand, as can be seen in Hideki's case, it is considered natural, if not necessary, for a man to marry again after the death of his wife:

> "After all, you didn't get married when Uncle died. I heard you tell Mama that you couldn't even think of such a thing." "It's different for men," Aya said. "They need someone to take care of the house and their children" (Mori 25).

Divorce, in the same fashion, is still not a widely recognized option for Japanese women:

> Despite the fact that the family system was legally abolished, the mentality of many Japanese remains imbedded in that system. This is exemplified by the fact that, in Japan many couples continue to stay legally married even under such circumstances [failure of the conjugal relationship]. ... in Japan monogamy has a short history, and polygamy is still acceptable. Extramarital affairs carried on by husbands are tacitly ignored, with wives saying, "I can live with it as long as he isn't in love with the other woman" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 190).

Women are supposed to uphold the facade of a happy and successful marriage, so as not to expose their husbands to ridicule and mistrust from the rest of male society, because "a man who had had two wives and could not control either of them was not fit to supervise other men" (Mori 166). However, many women cannot go on pretending to be happy in their relationships any longer. Thus, their only chance to bring continued suffering to an end without having to muster the courage to ask for a divorce and face contempt from society for doing so, is death. Many women, as was the case in Shizuko's situation, fear that once they are divorced, their husbands, with the backing of society, will require them to give up the one thing in their lives that gives them a sense of belonging and love, their children. It is quite common in Japan that:

> "when a couple gets divorced, ... the children usually remain with the father while the mother goes back to live with her parents. If there are two or three children, some of them might stay with their mother. But if there's only one child, the mother almost always ends up alone." The way her mother looked at Yuki, her face completely without a smile, Yuki knew what she meant. Like me, she thought but didn't say (Mori 128).

Society thus puts pressure on women to remain with their husbands and, taking away their children if they receive a divorce, seemingly punish them for their feelings. Hence, "even if a husband and wife cease to love each other, that alone is not usually viewed as a sufficient reason for divorce, so long as both continue to meet their parental obligations" (Yoshizumi, Kyoko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 192). What is appreciated in a woman in Japanese society is submissiveness and compliance to male ideals. However, at the same time these attributes in a woman are what causes many Japanese men to become bored in their homes and to go out and find sexual fulfillment and challenges in relationships with other women.

Submissiveness and compliance were also what Hideki had been looking for in his wife:

> That was how she was at her best -- gentle, quiet, always considerate about saving his feelings. In all their time together, she had never raised her voice at him or walked away to slam doors and to sulk (Mori 172).

However, Shizuko's compliance and subservience in order to please her husband were also what eventually drove him into another, more interesting woman's arms. Even in her death, Shizuko was acting according to her husband's expectations of her. Leaving him a final note, she writes:

> "Please forgive me ... for my weakness, for the trouble I have caused you. ... Please do not feel guilty in any way. What has happened is entirely my responsibility. ... I am almost happy at this last hour and I want you to be" (Mori 6).

However, coming to realize that this is exactly what she is attempting to escape from, Shizuko, in an act of defiance, tears the note to pieces, for once not absolving her husband of his guilt (Mori 7).

As many Japanese authors have realized correctly in analyzing the Japanese mother in their works "portraying her as tender and merciful and always ready to sacrifice herself for the child's welfare" (Ueda, The Mother of Dreams 13), women's self-actualization lies not in the relationship between husband and wife but in the children stemming from their conjugal relationship. Shizuko's own fulfillment in her role as mother is revealed through her suicide. Unwilling to give up her daughter Yuki in a divorce, but also unable to remain in a relationship with her unfaithful husband any longer, Shizuko decides to stand in her daughter's way no longer:

> This is the best I can do for her, she thought, to leave her and saved her from my unhappiness, from growing up to be like me. ... "You are a strong person," Shizuko continued. "You will no doubt get over this and be a brilliant woman. Don't let me stop or delay you. I love you" (Mori 6).

In bringing her own life to an end in an attempt to save Yuki from a fate similar to her own, Shizuko does not realize the fullness of motherhood, however. She leaves her daughter, isolated like a rock in the sea, vulnerable to negative influences and harm posed by society in general and her father's new wife in particular. Yuki is left on her own, having to make use of what her mother had taught her about life until her premature death, in order to survive in a cold, inhospitable home life. Japanese children, who have hardly any contact to their fathers due to their constant absence, are dependent on a good relationship with their mothers in order to develop a healthy emotional world. Virtually everything they are being taught on how to live life in a fulfilling way stems from their mothers. "There wasn't much Yuki knew that she hadn't been taught by her mother" (Mori 35). Even society, as a whole, usually rather negatively inclined towards women, acknowledges the importance mothers have in forming Japanese society by raising healthy individuals:

> "The 'mother' in Japan exists as more than just the mother of children. She is a symbol imbued with much value." In other words, when Japanese hear the word *mother* they do not call to mind the real, flesh-and-blood mother of their personal experiences but, rather, see a personification of "devotion to children, parental affection, and self sacrifice." For Japanese this image of mother exceeds money and honor in its ability to control behavior (Ohinata, Masami in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 205).

The presence of a mother appears to be particularly stressed in ensuring that children have a successful future. Thus, mothers are not only responsible for the healthy emotional life of their children, but also for their ability to make a successful entry into society once they leave the educational system:

> "... my friends said that they admired you a lot because you've done so well in everything even though..." ... "even though your mother's passed away and your father and stepmother

> never come to see you run or make speeches or anything " (Mori 56).

Women also play an extremely important and large role in the cycle of life. Not only do they bring new life into this world and nurture the offspring with all their love, so as to ensure their development into successful and responsible members of society, women also carry the burden of mistaken lives and death:

> "It's women's work," Shizuko had told her. It's always women's work, she thought now as she sat at the desk with a sheet of blank paper, to deal with the consequences of other people's deaths, their mistakes, broken promises (Mori 5).

Agonizing thus over the importance of the role of women, Yuki comes to reject her femininity, feeling that masculinity will save her from finding a fate like her mother did. She has her hair cut short, takes on sports such as track, and harbors a strong sense of fear of anything that could put her in touch with her femininity. She is determined to follow in her mother's quest for strength to stand up to and not let herself be oppressed by male society. Embracing Shizuko's example, Yuki decides not to have her honest and heart-felt emotions suppressed by the remnants of the family system long ago existent in Japan. According to this family system, women were at the very bottom of the Confucian principle of filial piety, expected to be reverent to all men and also women superior to them in status or in age. Yuki, however, does not allow for her emotions to be suppressed. Spiting her stepmother's demand for respect and filial piety from Yuki, she says quite frankly:

> "What do I want with good manners? Why should I pretend to be nice to people when they don't like me and I don't like them? It's not honest."
> Yuki had then looked her right in the eyes, something most children were taught never to do (Mori 95).

Yuki's defiance of male society and those conforming to it endows her with an enormous feeling of respect, gained from many other women who wish they themselves could muster the courage and independence not to conform to expectations, not to be dependent on males for their livelihood, leadership, and identity:

> "... you're very bright and you're president of your class. You beat the boy who ran against you because your speeches were so good. That's very rare, isn't it, for a girl to win the election and become president of her class at a coed school" (Mori 5/6)?

In analyzing the reason's for women's lack of virtue and unsalvability, Murasaki Shikibu, in her novel The Tale of Genji, offered, probably for the first time in Japanese history, criticism about the plight of the female gender. Stating that "women only wish to depend on others, and therefore lack the ability to take leadership," she is issuing an appeal for women's independence, telling them to break free from the conditions of their fathers, husbands, and sons (Okano, Haruko in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 20).

Thus, the admiration as a female leadership figure Yuki receives is due to the fact that she is secure enough not to correspond to the image of the typical Japanese woman. She does not subordinate herself to her father's and stepmother's will, rejects being identified with a women's role in the home, and rather ventures into other, more respected and acknowledged parts of society. Yuki is extremely intelligent and artistically inclined and tries to use her gifts to escape her naturally destined fate as a wife and mother in Japan's patriarchy. Despite the pronounced masculinity in Yuki's character she cannot entirely deny her femininity and she cannot continue blaming her mother for having left her behind in a cold, loveless world. She comes to realize the predominance of feelings over reason. This realization causes her to begin "to look beyond the sadness and pain her mother's death must still

bring her" (Mori 181), and understand the fact that her mother could neither give up her husband whom she had once loved very strongly, nor her child. Therefore, she had no choice but to bring her own life to an end in order to free herself from the indescribable misery she was experiencing, being confronted with the failure of her marriage on a daily basis:

> She should have forgotten him, Yuki thought now. She should have walked out of the room while he was sleeping and never gone back (Mori 200).
> ... Yuki went back to the first sketch of her father sleeping in the hospital bed. In both pictures, he looked slightly sullen but almost comical, endearing even -- the spoiled patient whose complaints had made her mother laugh. This is how she wanted to see him ... (Mori 201).

Having been afraid of loving anyone for a long time after her mother's suicide: "besides, she thought, love ends in sadness one way or another -- I don't want any more sadness" (Mori 198), Yuki, after a long inner struggle, comes to understand the importance of putting behind her sadness and grief and instead embrace life and love. She realizes that love is essential for carrying on a happy and fulfilled life and embraces what a close friend of her mother once told her: "I think now that it's worth it all the same, loving someone. It may not turn out right, but I want to love someone in spite of it" (Mori 149).

Yuki now understands that carrying on her mother's quest does not mean shutting herself off in grief and sadness from anyone who holds the potential to hurt her feelings. Doing so will only lead to a lonely, miserable life like her mother's. Rather, she realizes, her mother would have wanted her to reach out for the exact opposite, a life filled with love, laughter, and happiness. By discovering what her mother had never found in her marriage with Hideki, love and understanding, Yuki knows she will never "crowd up

her mind and erase her memories about her mother, the way one could record over something by mistake on a tape recorder" (Mori 114).

Understanding that it is her fate to help continue the cycle of life which requires love and warmth, she will now grow up strong as her mother's stories had suggested: "a girl who was born from a huge peach and grew up to fight the bad goblins on a far-away island" (Mori 131). Only her opponents will not be goblins on a far-away island but people around her who haven't yet learned to love.

Conclusion

In analyzing these four pieces of Japanese literature I have found that, regardless of whether the work was written by a male or female author, the main issue underlying the portrayal of Japanese women seems to be a battle between the sexes revolving around the deeply ingrained belief of society that women are the preservers of the cycle of life. As Kawabata noted in Snow Country, women seem to "hold both life and death in abeyance" (173). As the keepers of the life cycle women hold responsibility for bearing and nurturing life, as well as for dealing "with the consequences of other people's deaths" (Mori 5). This is a universally accepted role for women, not confined to Japanese society. However, judging from the analysis of the four novels I have read, as well as the experiences I have made during my stay in Japan, it appears to me that Japanese men, more so than American and European men, fear and therefore resent the idea that women should give up their role as preservers of the life cycle in order not to bastardize their own personal evolution. Both Tanizaki and Kawabata focused in their novels on the preservation of traditions of old which kept women confined to roles as wife and mother. These, again, are roles in which women bear and nurture life. In my opinion, understanding that only women have the ability to preserve the life cycle, most Japanese men refuse to honor women who take on positions different from wife and mother; thus trying to force them back into the roles which ensure the continuation of the cycle of life.

Looking now at the works of female authors and comparing them to Tanizaki's The Makioka Sisters and Kawabata's Snow Country, there seems to be evidence for a conflict between old and new perspectives of women's roles. Both Ariyoshi and Mori provide in their novels an alternative view to

the one provided in the novels of Kawabata and Tanizaki. Both female authors viewed women as capable of holding responsibilities outside their traditionally assigned realm of the home while at the same time fulfilling their important part as keepers of the cycle of life. The women portrayed were not willing to bastardize their own personal growth any longer. However, aware of the fact that their gender alone is able to keep the life cycle going, they did not let their own self-ascribed needs lead them to discard their roles as wives and mothers at the expense of life and love.

What seems to be creating the conflict between the sexes then, is the lack of understanding on the part of a great many men, that women are in fact capable of acting as the keepers of life while also holding responsibilities apart from those of wives and mothers.

Here I would like to look at another question: "Does life imitate art?" And if so how is that established in Japanese society? Since, for the first time in the 1950's, a group of women writers addressing the problems of woman- and motherhood emerged, the subject has been taken up by more and more female writers and seems to have had quite an impact on Japanese women and the way they now chose to live their lives. For example, many young Japanese women nowadays choose to remain single, and marriage has become one possibility among many others. Japanese women seem to have been embracing the heroines in novels who make the choice to get a divorce or cheat on their husbands in the same fashion they have been cheated on for ages. Japanese women appear to have found a model to emulate in the literature of these women writers, a motivation to change.

Men on the other hand do not find in literature a model that tells them to change. Male as well as female writers depict either the Japanese

salary man who hardly finds time to be with his family even on the weekends, or men like Kawabata's Shimamura who use and abuse the female instinct to nurture. With no suggestions for change, how and why would Japanese men reform themselves? Will they continue trying to confine women in dependent roles as is suggested to them by the depiction of men in both women's as well as men's literature? Will they wake up some day realizing that despite their efforts to confine women they have changed from the nurturing symbol of the mother and wife into less dependent but more demanding women? And what then?

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